

Lola Ya Bonobo Newsletter

October - November - December 2008

October

The bonobos are doing well, except for a few cold and some worm larvae beneath their skin, a remnant of the dry season. For the first time, Lomela is showing signs of a swollen vulva: is she older than she seems? Did malnutrition during her long captivity hinder her physical development that much? She is really funny! Her fur has completely grown back of course, but it sticks in all directions! She often takes care of the newest arrival, Sandoa, like a big sister. In the evenings, she enviously watches the big ones returning from the forest. « She is ready! » say the Mums. We are going to introduce her! This is swiftly achieved! You should see Lomela happily meeting her old friends from the nursery (already totally at ease with the big ones): Kikongo, Yolo, Kubulu, Mwanda and gentle Tshilenge!



Currant Feast

Twice a year, this strange shrub, composed of collections of small trunks, is covered



with beautiful clusters of succulent white currants. A delicacy! But a nightmare for the substitute mothers: The most beautiful specimen of this shrub is located on the path to the nursery... After bath time, while on route to their forest, the currant clusters quickly dismantle the ranks! It is a general assault! The baby bonobos climb everywhere, stuffing themselves with currants! The Mums' cries and



threats have absolutely no effect: One must patiently await the end of the feast!

I love this lack of discipline ! I watch hidden from my office window and silently laugh at the disorder and the Mums' despair... Come on, leave them be, it's an exercise for the reintroduction!

November



Like all of Africa, Lola is celebrating Obama's election. My staff is happy to see that I am proudly wearing a badge to pledge my support to the handsome President! But in enclosure 3, the month starts badly for « Baby Moji », Tshilomba's little one: He is suffering from a bad bout of bloody diarrhea. For the first time ever, we have to take him away from his mother to be able to treat him properly, because the mother is opposed to all our efforts to approach him! Time is running out! Moji knows us all and normally approaches us easily, but without his mother, things are different! He is very scared and remains lying down, nose to the ground, in a corner of the room. We have many mum volunteers who lovingly spend their days and nights with him to comfort him and

patiently treat him. Like Sophie, the nurse from France, on holiday at Lola : Fanny, the vet in training; Zanna, a student in behavioral observations at St Andrews University; and Gladez, another student, on her way to the National Park of Lomako to look for wild bonobos. A few sleepless nights later, I return Baby Moji to his mum who cannot believe her eyes to see him alive in my arms! A beautiful emotional moment, observed by almost all the Lola staff, who accompany Tshilomba's cries of joy with their human sounds.... Sounds that would probably be very interesting to analyze !!! (mine included!)

Accompanied by Michel Halbwax and Marie-Laure Doppagne, our volunteer vets, Crispin leaves for Lubumbashi (DRC) for the annual veterinary meeting of PASA¹, which is attended by the vets from all African PASA member sanctuaries. Meanwhile, we stay to observe Maniema, whose curious gait suggests a serious problem, and Elikia, who appears to have caught the same illness as little Moji...

As always, Anne-Marie, our nurse, takes charge of the situation, helped by Patrick and Clémence, our vets. Stany, the bonobo keeper who is specialist at shooting anesthetic darts, successfully outsmarts the vigilance of Semendwa, Elikia's mum. The operation is a total success: Elikia is also saved ! What a relief!

¹ Pan-African Sanctuary Alliance. « Lola ya bonobo » has been a member of PASA since its creation.

Maniema

Back from PASA, Crispin and Marie-Laure immediately concur that an ultrasound scan is urgently needed: A large abdominal mass has appeared on Maniema's hip! It would be easy if one of the veterinary clinics possessed such an instrument. Unfortunately, they do not, and as usual, it is difficult to imagine getting one done at a local clinic for humans, which will never agree to receive one of our bonobos! I tactfully ask Dr Kasango, who treats Amazone (see Newsletter #41), if he knows of a solution. « Of course I do: me! » he laughs, « I will find you a portable ultrasound scanner. It would be a pleasure to be of assistance! »



This is how our kind doctor finds himself with an unexpected patient with an « almost human » body (as he jokingly referred to it). Diagnosis: a triple abscess! Thank God! I dreaded some kind of tumor and am so relieved.... Treatment and recovery expected within a fortnight!

The death of Amazone

Alas, my friends, our little Amazone has left us.... We buried her yesterday afternoon in the presence of the whole village and the staff of Lola, who all came to show their solidarity with these people so far from their home. She died suddenly in our arms on Thursday evening, but did not suffer. She had just returned from visiting Doctor Baume and an ENT specialist; back at Lola, she asked her mum Carine for a meal. She was with Anne-Marie, Lola's nurse, who was looking after her. Suddenly, a chesty cough and... the end. It was 7p.m., I was about to leave for Kinshasa, passing just outside her pavilion. Anne-Marie called me, ran to the infirmary to get a stethoscope (I was still thinking it was a malaise), but we soon had to face reality, she had left us. At that moment, Carine arrived carrying her favorite food..

As I explained to her parents, we did everything we could have done. "Sometimes giving your all is still not enough", as JJ Goldman states in one of his compositions. That is what happened today. I do not believe in their God, but I told them with comforting words that He had called her back to Him because He needed another angel in Paradise! Marie-Laure, who had invested so much of her time taking care of Amazone since the very beginning broke down with sadness. All the doctors who came into contact with this courageous little girl had their heart stolen. I would like to thank them from the bottom of my heart for everything they did in these difficult circumstances. First and foremost, thank you to Dr Baume, for his availability, his patience, and his impressive knowledge! I would also like to say a special thank you to Doctor Castanet from Nice for his precious help, for the time he spent finding all the treatments that Dr Baume needed, and for never hesitating a single moment, along with his partner, to contribute his resources to make everything possible. And through him, I also thank all his colleagues who helped to gather all needed drugs and materials.

I would also like to thank Marie-Paule, Lily and Janine at the Belgian embassy, who gave us the one and only contact in Kinshasa: Geoffrey de Lindekerke, Ambassador of the Order of Malta, who recommended Dr Kasongo to us.

On that day (a few hours earlier I did not know where my search would take me), the barge carrying Amazone and her family from Basankusu (after I had managed to persuade the Captain to take Amazone on board - see Newsletter #41), moored at Maluku, the last port before Kinshasa on the Congo River. During this voyage of 13 days of hell with about a thousand people, crammed among luggage, goats and other goods destined for the capital city (since the war there is often only one boat every six months coming from Basankusu, a small town deep in the forest where bonobos live), with an extreme lack of privacy, this family had been forced to hide their child, as if she were a living monster!



That Monday, I finally knew whom to turn to: I realised that, for such a case, all the roads of the Congo lead to Dr Kasongo ! Even Marie-Laure's father, who used to be a doctor in Kinshasa, confirmed what the whole town was telling me: You must see Dr Kasongo ! Kind Doctor Kasongo, humane and generous, who gave us hope and introduced us to Dr Baume. Thank you to all those who gave so generously to this family which had so little: thank you to the daughters of Zéna Achour and Ommid (in San Diego) for the beautiful dolls which lit up Amazone's eyes with happiness to possess such a treasure! Thank you to Albert Busine's family for offering a comfortable house in a quiet spot along the river, close to Lukaya Falls. Thank you to the association of Congolese mothers for offering Marie-Laure their unconditional support. Thank you to Vanessa Wood, who contacted Sarah from the UK-based association "Facing the world", who was due to carry out the reconstruction of Amazone's face following chemotherapy. Thank you to everyone who believed in our hope to 'do everything' to ensure Amazone got her old face back. Thank you to Freddy, trainee nurse, and to Mother Souza, the nurse in charge of Amazone at Dr Tshimi's Alliance Center where she was hospitalized for her chemotherapy. I must also thank all the men and women of Lola for their devotion. They stayed with this grief-stricken family until the end, with the generosity that is typical of Africans when confronted with death.

It was a simple yet moving ceremony, full of respect for this child who was subjected to such suffering but who never complained. When she left us, she took a piece of my heart with her, but for Lola, she will continue to symbolize strength and courage. She was a passing angel in our paradise.

*Love to you all.
Claudine.*

Amazone's
Funeral



The House of Lords and Twycross Zoo

The string of health scares ensures there is never a moment's rest at Lola, yet I have to leave for London, where Doctor Suzanne Boardman, Director of Twycross Zoo is waiting for me. Suzanne is the creator of the first ever Badham Evans (named after the co-founders of Twycross Zoo) Award for Women in Conservation, a prize I am due to receive on 25 November at the House of Lords. Suzanne and Claire Pipe, her assistant, have gone to a great deal of trouble to ensure everything is perfect! And it is! Speeches, photos, fancy cakes and walks down the corridors of this fabulous building, trying to avoid security to sneakily take the odd photo! A few internationally renowned actresses also attended, including Stefanie Powers, a redhead undoubtedly more famous than me - she stars in « The Avengers » - whom we had already met at Mount Kenya where she resides (she did us the honor of coming to visit us during PASA conferences that were organized there). My daughter Fanny, who is accompanying me, finds the Lords impressive, very « British », but a little old for her taste !



Afterwards we head to Twycross Zoo to meet their bonobos. They are pleasantly calm, which is usually difficult to achieve in the smaller bonobo communities in zoos. During a reception with the Lords and other officials, Suzanne Boardman officially launches a campaign to save the bonobos in the DRC, hereby supporting our vision of reintroduction into the wild and the public awareness campaigns of Pierrot and Blaise, as well as the educational campaign of Awely², the association which shares our office in Basankusu and aims to offer alternative micro-projects to hunters and bushmeat merchants. Suzie hopes to convince these elected officials to gather some of the funds needed for these *in situ* measures and to build improved installations for the bonobos at Twycross Zoo, the only bonobo population living in captivity in Great Britain.

December

I have but one aim for the end of this year: to obtain before 31 December all the authorizations and letters of support for our project « EKOLO YA BONOBO » and have the Pôo forest reclassified as « Center for the re-adaptation of Congo's bonobos to life in the wild ». Mission accomplished : on 23 December Mr José Endundu, the Environment Minister, sends me the official documents.

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² French Association aiming to mitigate or resolve conflicts between humans and animals

This trimester at the nursery

Lomela takes Sandoa under her wing

Lomela - also known as « the Big one » - is the boss at the nursery. As Mum Espérance approaches the nursery's enclosure to take some sugarcane for Sandoa, who is still in quarantine, Lomela kidnaps the little one, who is playing on the ground, and runs away from the group. In an attempt to reassure her new doll, she caresses her erotically, then holds her to her stomach and grooms her. Espérance tries to take Sandoa back, but Lomela turns on her heels and runs into the forest. Keep running, Espérance! It takes more than half an hour of negotiating to catch the kidnapper! Fortunately, Espérance knows her « Big one » well. She plays to her greediness, and finally Lomela agrees to exchange Sandoa for a bottle of milk!



*Katako
and
Sandoa*

Welcome to Nursery, Sandoa!

Quarantine over, Sandoa is introduced in the nursery. Like a child on their first day at nursery school, Sandoa desperately clings on to her substitute mum. She is welcomed by her new friends with unbounded excitement! Everyone wants to touch her and introduce her to the joy of sex! Katako, who is very responsible for his age, decides to restore

order to this commotion and ensure the little newbie's reception is warm, friendly and civilized. Yet it will undoubtedly take some time to conquer shy Sandoa.

Narcissus in Paradise

Sandoa thrives in Paradise. But she is still somewhat intimidated by the surrounding group of restless hairy angels. What she prefers is leafing through a notebook full of drawings of the bonobos. She recognizes herself on the first page, and when turning the pages, appears to be saying: « Oh! Look, it's me again! » Fascinated, she grabs the picture of herself and hugs it. You are right, Sandoa, we never love ourselves enough... She may be introverted, but she is also very bright, this little one!

Masisi becomes bolder

In the nursery's youngest group, Masisi appears dynamic and unruly. It is delightful for the mums to see her gaining independence. A true reward for their attentive care! She distances herself from Mummy Yvonne more and more frequently and no longer panics when not in her company. She has even begun climbing the trees with recklessness.



Masisi

Milk, what a success!

Like human babies, baby bonobos love milk. Feeding time is always a favored moment at the nursery. The little ones congregate around the mum, in a battle to be served first. No dwindling allowed, lest the bonobos get impatient! The excitement sometimes leads to quarrels between Vanga and Saké on one side, and Eleke and Katako on the other, but the conflicts are always quickly resolved by the mums' impartial intervention. Come on! There is enough for everyone, children!



Lomela joins the big ones

Lomela leaves the nursery once she has acquired complete independence. In any case, she could no longer stand having the mums on her heels and she kept running away in the trees surrounding the enclosure. As soon as she enters enclosure 3 with the big ones -- accompanied by Henriette, just in case!-- Lomela shows no sign of stress and quickly frees herself from her substitute mum to join her new friends. Kikongo, Yolo and Kubulu form the welcome committee. It is impressive to see Lomela integrate into her new family so happily! The sexual attention she receives proves very beneficial, and Yolo in particular she cannot resist. She has even become the darling of the group: everyone chases her and flirts with her. She loves that! The transition has gone really well, and Lomela can now lead her adult life.

Births at Lola

On 3 October, Benoît, head nutritionist and guide in Lola, became a Dad !
A beautiful little girl, Emmanuella, weighing 2.5kgs.
Mum and Baby are Dad's pride and joy!!



Emmanuella, Mum and Dad Benoit



Claudia

Then Héléne, our accountant, gives birth to an adorable little girl called Claudia, weighing 2.9kgs.

Good luck to both newborns!!

Greetings from Claudine

Dear loyal friends of « Friends of Bonobos in Congo³ »

The year is coming to a close. Once again it was a succession of adventures and new experiences!!! « Lola ya Bonobo », our little paradise, prepared itself day after day for the departure of certain bonobos to a new territory : « Ekolo ya Bonobo », in the great Equatorial forest, the land of the bonobos of Congo, along the Lopori River with its beautiful dark water, where they will be welcomed in June of next year.

I would like to take advantage of this time of the year to thank you all for being so loyal in following our Congolese adventures! Thank you for supporting these two projects - LOLA and EKOLO YA BONOBO - through our sister organizations « Amis des Bonobos en Europe⁴ » and « Friends of Bonobos », which allows us to be ever closer to our friends the BONOBOs of Congo, who so need us!

Thank you to those who have volunteered to accompany me every day in this effort: Dominique Morel, our brilliant Vice-President, and Valérie Dhanani, our precious treasurer. Thank you to our staff for their dedication and hard work. I cannot cite them all, though I would like to do so; let me simply mention Crispin, his health team, and Michel, a vet volunteer who gives a helping hand from afar and makes the writing of these awful reports less tedious. Throughout the year they have all been busy preparing for the reintroduction. Thanks to Pierrot and his education team who through hard work and many field visits have managed the various human and administrative steps necessary to create the new site at EKOLO. Thank you to Marie-Laure for choosing this new initiative of A.B.C. as the subject of her thesis and for staying by our side for many months in Basankusu. A special thank you to those who affectionately share every day of our bonobos' lives: the Mums, the keepers and the assistant-keepers ! Thank you to everyone else who works to make « Lola ya bonobo » what it is: A haven of beauty, peace and serenity!

Thank you to Marie-Laure who unreservedly dedicated herself, following the example of Dr Baume, Dr Kasongo, Dr Castanet and all those we didn't meet but who did everything possible to ensure our little angel Amazone courageously received treatment and left to join another Paradise peacefully, without suffering. That will be the lesson I have learnt in the year 2008: « Sometimes giving your all is still not enough »...

All my best wishes for the festive season!

A last wish: That 2009 be just as captivating, exhilarating and full of promises!

I am thinking of you all!

Claudine.

³ From the name of our Congolese organization, "Les Amis des Bonobos du Congo" (ABC).

⁴ French-based "Friends of Bonobos in Europe" association